



"Good words are worth much and cost little."—Herbert.

GOOD WORDS

FOR 1867



EDITED BY

NORMAN MACLEOD, D.D.

ONE OF HER MAJESTY'S CHAPLAINS FOR SCOTLAND

And illustrated by

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The First Christmas.

THEY in a manger laid Thee,
 Thou Monarch of the sky;
 And men no homage paid Thee,
 Thou Highest of the High.
 While stars proclaimed Thy wondrous ways,
 While hosts of angels sang Thy praise,
 Thou camest down to die.

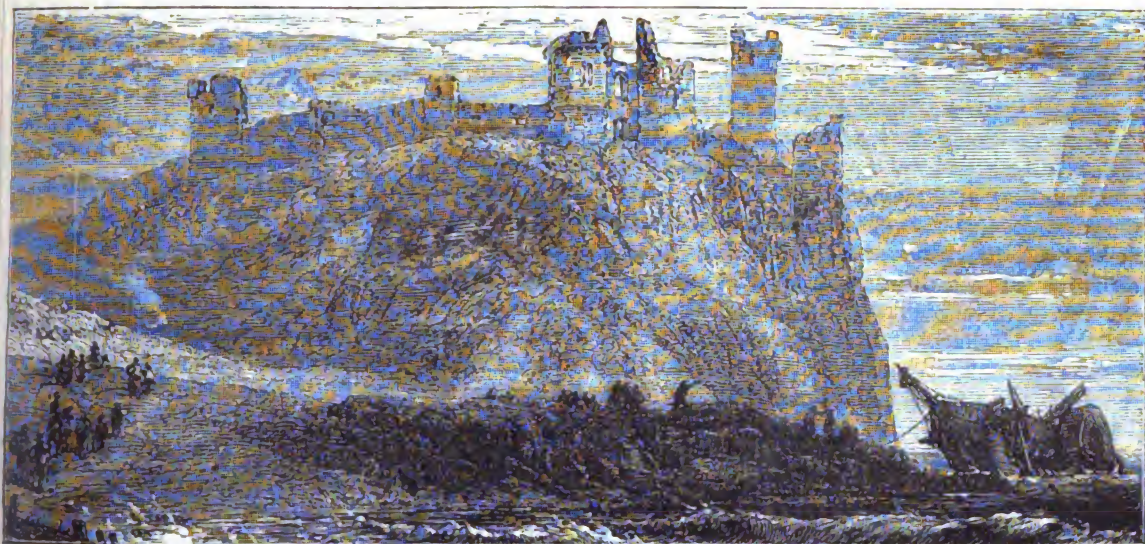
With humblest heart Thou tookest
 The lot Thou hadst made Thine:
 Heaven's glory Thou forsookest
 For huts where poor men pine.
 Thou wert a slave to make us free:
 It was Thy gladness, Lord, to see
 All share Thy grace divine.

Thou, Saviour, wert the meekest—
 Thy words gave peace of soul;
 And still Thou healing speakest
 To all who would be whole.
 A hope, a trust, a Father mild,
 Thou art to each repentant child
 That seeks the grandest goal.

Shamed, tortured, lonely, friendless,
 Nailed to the fatal tree,
 Thou didst by anguish endless
 Gain endless life for me.
 Now in Thy holy, holy name
 Bows every knee—thy triumphs flame
 Sublime from sea to sea.

May Thy example cheer us,
 Strengthen, exalt, inspire;
 May Thou be ever near us;
 A sacred mystic fire
 Dwell in the temple of our breast,
 And when we sink to final rest
 Be Thou our sole desire.





MADAME SAINT-ANGE.

BY MRS. OLIPHANT.

I.

It was on a December night, not very many years ago, that the Jersey boat was cast ashore in the bay of St. Malo. Few people comparatively, in England at least, know the charms of this bay, bristling with brown rocks, dotted with isles, with wild waves rushing headlong in against the city walls—or, what is pleasanter, the brightest of northern seas, speckled by hundreds of white-sailed boats, stretching out blue to the horizon. In a tiny little house perched upon the cliff at Dinard opposite, looking out upon the embouchure of the Rance and the lower bight of the bay, the present writer once passed several quiet weeks. There I heard the tale I am about to tell you. It was told me on a night to be specially remembered, when the moon and the sea were both full, and the square window of the little sitting-room was full of both, looking on to the gleaming water, and the blue sky, and the great silver light overhead, as you might have looked from a window in a ship. The tale is Marie's, and not mine, though I have ventured to add certain details. Dinard is on the Breton side, on the edge of that province where romance and poetry alone linger in France. And Marie, being a Bretonne, wore a cap which stood round her head like a great square framework, white as snow, and stiff as starch, setting forth her clear brown face, which was beautiful as only goodness could make it, with a singular dignity. She was past the age of prettiness, and time and weather had taken from her all the softness of youth; but the face was such a noble, serious peasant face, as one sees oftener in pictures than in real life. I have her photograph—which was done, she supposed, for the sake of her cap, and to her great wonderment. If it had been her pretty niece, she could have understood it—but herself! On that moonlight night, when she had put the salad, and the brown bread, and the wine on the table, Marie paused and told her story: for to light a lamp and shut out the heavenly stillness outside was out of human possibilities. Her husband was a sailor, and a sailor's wife tells the story of a wreck with a certain personal trembling which gives it a vividness beyond the power of



art. I do not vouch that everything is certain or possible in the tale—I give it you as it was told to me.

It was, then, on a December night that the *Bonne Espérance*, of St. Helier's, was cast ashore. It was a little trading vessel, not a passenger boat, with an incomplete crew and too much merchandise. Two of the passengers were swept off the decks in the act of making a raft, by means of which they hoped to reach the land which was so near. They were swept off, and their frail planks with them, into the seething sea, in the blackness of the night, and at the height of the storm. This was the first loss. But before the ship itself drove in, and jammed itself hard and fast on the awful rocks, every soul on board had perished out of it except one forlorn little ship-boy, who had clung like a cat to the mast. Except himself, there was not a sign of life in the vessel; but, when the fishermen clambered over the dizzy needle-points next morning to take the lad, more than half dead, off his terrible perch, they told him that he was not the only survivor. Two women clasped in each other's arms had been carried far in upon the little expanse of sand close by, on the crest of a tremendous wave which had left them there—the highest and wildest wave of all the storm—and had been taken into one of the cottages. One of them was old, and had been brought to life without much difficulty; the other young, and she was lying between life and death. They were the most helpless, and yet, as it proved, they were the only survivors—for the cabin-boy died, what with his exposure, what with the blow he had received on the final striking of the ship. The women were taken to Marie's cottage, and there struggled back into life.

The eldest was Madame Saint-Ange, who, notwithstanding her name, was an Englishwoman, the wife of a French merchant lately returned from India. She was a woman who had been very tolerant of her husband and his nationality, but yet was so far influenced by it as to be doubly English in her own person, standing upon her insular character, and very ready to take arms in favour of her countrymen. The younger was Lucy Dean, her niece and adopted child. They had lost everything, except a certain pocket-book which Madame Saint-Ange had about her person; and they had lost their sole earthly prop and protector. M. Saint-Ange had not collected a fortune. He had his share in a business at Calcutta, and he had enough money for his travelling expenses, but that was about all. A younger partner had accompanied the party—or rather, the son of a late partner of M. Saint-Ange—young Robert Elphinstoun. He and Lucy had been much together, and, as was natural, had fallen in love, as people say, and had just become pledged to each other and were beginning to think of their wedding-day. It was he and M. Saint-Ange who were swept off the deck of the *Bonne Espérance* almost at the beginning of the storm; and the two poor women were scarcely grateful to Marie and her husband for bringing them to life and a sense of their miseries. Madame Saint-

Ange bore it, for she was getting old, and knew that trouble must be borne; but poor Lucy would not bear it. She had a fever, and was very ill and raved about the horrible black sea and the white foam, that was like the lips of a wild beast. It was all they could do to save her mind ultimately, but it was February before she could begin to take a few feeble steps about the house. They were the only survivors; the very spars and planks of the wreck had come to pieces. It lay in pitiful fragments upon the shore; though, happily, poor Madame Saint-Ange, who sometimes took a melancholy walk there, did not know what these fragments were. In a sunshiny day the bay was so bright, the water so blue, the sails skimmed about so gaily, and the fortress of St. Malo stood out so brave and strong against the sky, that the poor widow, who was not an exaggerated person, could not bear that malice against the sea which her niece had. Lucy had been seized with horror and fierce enmity against that smiling ocean. It was not an inanimate thing, it was a horrible personality. When she heard the soft ripple on the shore of nights, her heart grew sick in her exhausted bosom; and when storms came on, she would get up and walk about, weak as she was, with difficulty keeping quiet—sometimes, unable to restrain herself, crying out against it, beating the air with her thin arms. "What harm did we ever do?" she would cry; and because she dared not, being at bottom a tender and pious soul, address her reproaches to God, she addressed them to the horrible waves that foamed and wrangled over the rocks. Poor Lucy! And she was so young and had still so long to live. She was not well enough to be removed, and yet it was to her like murder every time she heard that moaning of the sea.

"Auntie, I am strong now," she would say, holding out her thin hands. "Take me away—anywhere—I don't mind where we go. Deep into the land—the land—where there will be no sea."

"Yes, my love," Madame Saint-Ange would say, patting the weird white hands; "yes, my darling, as soon as ever you are able to be moved. Marie and poor Antoine are so kind."

Lucy turned away shuddering, and hid her face. "Yes, I know they are kind," she said; "but I am not grateful to them. Why did not they let us lie where we were? The bitterness of death was over. We had no more to bear. Why did they bring us back to know everything—and suffer everything—and live?"

"My dear," said the poor aunt, "because it is what everybody should do to save life."

"Do you call this life?" cried Lucy. "Did they know better than God? That is what God meant—that we should all have gone together, and taken hands and marched in singing into heaven. But, oh, those cursed, officious men that will always interfere!"

"Lucy! Lucy!" cried Madame Saint-Ange. "Oh, Lucy, my darling, you never—never—said such words before!"

"It was not swearing," cried poor Lucy, and then she burst into tears. She was so young—the

was the sting to her. She felt, in spite of herself, that her strength was coming back: day by day she was more able to think, more able to walk, felt her appetite coming back (which was, perhaps, the most dreadful of all, and made her hate herself), and all her forces rallying as it were around the citadel of life. She began to feel as if she might live a hundred years—such a life as it would be, without love and without hope!

And then the tender little woman, who had herself sustained a heavier loss—the loss of her life's companion, the nearest and dearest of all her friends—came to the weeping girl and caressed and comforted her. "God knows I should have been glad to be with my poor Louis," said Madame Saint-Ange; "but I can't think it was God's will, Lucy. When a thing is His will, it is done; what men do can't make much difference; and we must submit to His will. My darling, you are impatient because you are so young. When you are as old as I am——"

"Oh, auntie, do you think I will ever be as old as you?" said Lucy, with a cry of horror.

The good woman was almost a little offended. "One must live as long as God pleases," she said. "If it is his will that we should be old, we ought to be glad to be old. Neither life, nor anything else in this world, can be as we like."

"Oh, aunt, forgive me," said Lucy. "I did not mean that. I should be glad to be old like you. What I am frightened for is to live all those dreadful years—for you know I am not twenty yet," the poor child said, softly. That was the sting of her despair—not to be twenty, and yet to have lost everything in life; this was what she thought. To be so young, with no prospect of being done with it. To have everything clear before her, and suffer—suffer—suffer for twice as many years; for Lucy had not learnt the limits of poor human nature; she did not know that people cease to suffer. She expected it would always be the same, and never lighten or change; which was a kind of comfort to her—if comfort could be.

Madame Saint-Ange, however, knew better, and she made her arrangements quietly. For herself, she was almost sorry to leave that bristling, rugged coast—it seemed to be her husband's grave. While Lucy lay on her sofa, putting her hands on her ears that she might not hear the sound of the rising tide, her aunt would steal down to the bit of sandy beach upon which they had been cast, and sit down under the shelter of the rocks, and cry softly by herself. She missed him so. They had advised each other all their life long, since the distant days when she was young, like Lucy; she had done nothing without him, nor he without her; they had talked everything over, represented to each other that this or this was the best; and now there was nobody to help her or say what was best. But it was not sharp despair that was in her heart. "It cannot be for very long," she said to herself; and the waves came in softly over the sand, and hushed and soothed her. "Patience, patience," they seemed to say. "A little

while ye shall not see me; and again a little while——" It was the same sea which had swallowed him up which gave those words of comfort to the sorrowful woman; but they soothed her as well as the softest breeze would have done over a safe grave in the green turf. What did it matter? And it could not be so very long before she found him again. This was the great difference between them. And Madame Saint-Ange was thankful to Marie and Antoine, if not for her own life, at least for her child's, and took comfort in talking to the tender-hearted peasant woman, who would tell her—whether it was quite fact or not—that mademoiselle was better. "She is very miserable," Marie would say, with the pitying superiority of experience; "but madame knows that cannot last." It was one of the luxuries of youth to them. But Lucy, with a shudder at the sight of the sea when she went out for the first time, wandered away to the village burying-ground, and read the names on the little crosses, and felt as if all the desolate land and all those silent mounds were lifting up voices along with her, crying out against the cruel storms and the awful sea. There were so many shipwrecked sailors and lost fishermen among the dead; and there was a seaman's funeral going on in the little church when she knelt down there. "The earth was full of farewells to the dying and requiems for the dead;" and she was but twenty, and it would never—never change.

II.

"MADemoiselle improves day by day," said Marie. "Madame perceived that she liked the *soufflé* yesterday. She would not say so, *pauvre petite*; but one could see it. Ah, yes, she is better. The good God will yet console you for your trouble."

"Ah, Marie, she is very feeble—very feeble," said Madame Saint-Ange; "and then so sad; and that dreadful horror she has of the sea."

"*Ma bonne petite dame*," said Marie, "take courage. When the health improves the spirit grows stronger. She is sad—it is true she is sad. Could anything else be looked for? And as for the sea, *moi qui parle*, there are times when I cannot support the sound of it. When my poor Antoine is on his voyages—*allez*—that kills! Mademoiselle will be stronger soon, *nous allons voir*."

"I hope you are right, Marie," said the widow; "I trust with all my heart you are right. But it has lasted so long already; and when the March winds begin to blow, and the equinox—if we cannot leave before then—how is she ever to bear it, poor child?"

"Madame knows," said Marie, raising her apron to her eyes, "that it will go to my heart to part with her and with mademoiselle. *Chère petite*, she cannot support the sight of me; but I am not angry with her. I understand. If some one had saved me—when my Antoine was lost—Ah, it is not to be spoken of. But though it will break my heart to part with madame, who is always so full of goodness, yet there is a *charmant pays* up the river where

the air is delicious, and where mademoiselle might escape from the storms. *C'est mon pays*. There are many, many of the English there. It is Dinan, and it is truly charming. The distance is short, and mademoiselle could bear the journey. I know a poor fellow—a brave *homme*, but with many children—my faith, quite an English family—who has an easy *char-à-banc*. There are curtains, if it should be too cold, and cushions, so that she could lie down; and poor François is the honestest, the kindest of men. Madame will feel with him as with a brother; he will watch over *ces dames*, and go fast or slow as they please; and, except for the wind among the trees, mademoiselle will not hear the storm there; though the parting," said Marie, again lifting her apron, "will go to my heart."

"Dear Marie," said Madame Saint-Ange, "I shall never forget your kindness. When things go better with us—if things ever go better—we shall come back and see you. I should like to come back and put up a little monument——"

Here even her composure—patient woman as she was—failed her, and she broke down and wept on Marie's kind shoulder. Marie touched the widow softly with her hard, tender peasant's hand, and spoke her little word of comfort.

"*Du courage, ma bonne petite dame*," she said. "The *bon Dieu* will not forsake you. *Du courage*."

And the soft little woman, weak and growing old, took courage; and lifted herself up, and dried her tears, and addressed herself to the only duty that was left with that bravery so little to be looked for, so common, so wonderful. With but one link to life left her, she rose up to guard that one, with the strength of an army, notwithstanding the languid blood and unelastic mind of declining years. But there are some people who are always young.

Lucy accordingly was got to Dinan, though with a great deal of trouble. Notwithstanding her horror of the sea, she was too much broken in body and soul to think it worth while to move.

"What did it matter?" she said: "there or here I will just be the same. I hate myself, auntie. You have had as much to bear as I have, and you bear it. Cast me out anywhere on the road-side, and let me die: that is what I deserve. What does it matter to me where I am? You have had as much to bear as I."

"Ah, but I have you, Lucy," said Madame Saint-Ange.

"And I have you!" cried Lucy, throwing her arms round her only supporter; "and I ought to bear it best. Oh, what a wretch I am! Take me anywhere you like, and I will try—I will try."

"Thanks, my precious darling," said the aunt; and she was as grateful as if Lucy had done something for her.

And so the two travelled sadly along the rainy roads with dreadful thoughts in their hearts of the last time they had driven through a strange landscape.

Roads there, on the very edge of Brittany, with hedgerows and villages, were not so unlike the

Jersey roads through which they had passed before that awful voyage with their two companions who were now at the bottom of the cruel sea. The two poor women said very little to each other; but it seemed to Madame Saint-Ange as if her husband had been but now beside her in the *char-à-banc*, and as if Robert Elphinstoun, with his cigar, and his bright looks, and his merry ways, must just a moment before have been sitting beside the driver, turning round to them with his frequent comments. Up to that dark moment it had been such pleasant travelling. Late in the year, no doubt, and cold, but such a perfect party—the old couple, life-long friends, half-lovers still—the young people at the very height of their romance. And now the end of it was this—two forlorn poor women flying drearily from the sound of the sea through the bare roads, and stripped wintry hedges, and the soaking February rain. It was so like, that when they stopped and anything had to be done, Madame Saint-Ange's first impulse was to call for Louis; and it was so unlike; her voice dried in her throat, and her heart sunk in her breast when she had to draw out her purse tremblingly and pay for the *cheval de renfort*, or for François' glass of cider, with her own hands; and Lucy lay speechless among the cushions pale as a ghost, scarcely moving. They were alone in the world.

We will not attempt to describe Dinan, which so many people know. It is a Breton town with an English colony, and the English colony, of course, has an English church, and an English baker, and English ways of its own. But with these our two visitors had little to do. They did not hear the equinox rage over the bay of St. Malo, disturbing perhaps, as it occurred to Lucy's sick imagination to fear, the sacred remains that lay at the bottom of that sea. They did not hear it; but yet the wind among the tree-tops put them in mind of that they did not hear, and I doubt whether that was much better. Madame Saint-Ange had been a very steadfast Protestant in her husband's lifetime; and she was still a steadfast Protestant, and would no more have knelt at the confessional or worshipped the Saint-Sacrament than you would. But yet she learned, like Lucy, to steal into the church, which always opened its hospitable doors to them, and to sink down in a corner and say her quiet prayers where no one noticed her, better than to go to the little English meeting, where English people, in their Sunday clothes, gazed curiously, and asked each other whether they should call. I believe the open church, with its quiet, its freedom, its sacred mumble of a mass at the altar, which one knew in one's confused soul was worship, but which one was not called upon to take part in, or—more kindly still—the chanted Psalms of vespers, when the short winter day was closing in, and a few candles twinkled in the quiet gloom—became very dear to them. Nobody reproved them for sitting there or kneeling there as long as they had a mind. They could weep, or they could pray, or simply sit silent in the exhaustion which follows every outburst of

emotion, as long as they pleased, and nobody disturbed them. And they liked it better than the little English conventicle where the good people threatened to call. And yet there never were two people less likely to become converts to Rome. Many another poor pilgrim who has carried a sore heart through a Catholic country will understand what I mean.

They stayed a long time at Dinan; neither of them quite knew how long—all through the summer; through the greenness of the woods, and the flush of blossom and flower. The pocket-book containing the money intended for the pleasant journey, which had been about Madame Saint-Ange's person, had been enough, quite enough as yet for their frugal life. But as the immediate pressure of grief and of anxiety about Lucy lightened a little, she began to feel that it was necessary to think of provision for the future. She had nobody to do anything for her, and Lucy was more helpless than herself. Lucy, indeed, had been set entirely ajar by her great shock and calamity. Her sweet notes were all jangled out of tune. She resisted her aunt's desire to write to their friends at Calcutta, who all this time had been left in ignorance of their fate; and it had not occurred to Madame Saint-Ange, who had never learned how to manage outside matters for herself, to send to the address where their letters were to be forwarded; and where even then a letter from Robert Elphinstoun's guardian about his marriage with Lucy was turning yellow in a post-office window. Mr. Elphinstoun could not understand the silence which followed, but he was only a distant relative with no warm tie of affection, and he had taken it calmly. All these things had escaped from the mind of Madame Saint-Ange. She had died as it were in that storm, and the new world she had been called back to was not the same world. It was a world in which she and Lucy had been cast ashore, bits of wreck, waifs reclaimed from the ocean, with all the ties broken that once bound them to their fellow-creatures. But as the days went by, and their common aspect came back, the widow began by degrees to bethink herself of those secondary necessities which so often take the foremost place. She had still enough of money to last for some time, but it would not last for ever, and then she remembered that her poor Louis did not belong to herself alone, but to the world he had once lived in. She had nobody to do it for her, and she was not herself a very ready correspondent; and Lucy was so much against it.

"Why should you write?" Lucy said. "It was you and me dear uncle Louis belonged to. What has anybody else to do with our troubles? And as for *him*—oh! auntie—you know he had no one—"

"There was his uncle in Scotland, dear, and his guardian, who was written to, you know," faltered Madame Saint-Ange. Poor Lucy's cheeks grew whiter still at this suggestion, if whiter could be.

"There was nobody who loved him," she burst forth; "nobody. You know that was what made

him so happy when—oh! auntie, do not make me talk—you know."

"I know, Lucy," said Madame Saint-Ange; "but, my pet, we must not think only of our own feelings. His friends must be told—his relations; and then for ourselves; my life will not be a very long one, but you are young, my darling, and we have nothing to live upon. They will make me an allowance, most likely."

"Is it for that?" said Lucy. "Let us go somewhere, and let me work, auntie. I can work for both of us. It would do me good. I know it would do me good. Then I might feel, perhaps, as if there was some use for me in this world. Don't ask anything from anybody. I can give lessons. I can be a governess, or something. Let us keep our troubles to ourselves."

"My dearest child," said the poor aunt, at her wit's end, "I hope it will never come to that. We shall not be rich, but they will give us enough to live on. Your dear mother and I were brought up with very different ideas. I hope it will never come to that."

"And I would rather it did—a thousand times rather," said Lucy. "It is the only thing that would do me any good."

Thus their discussions would come to an end; and the widow, balked in her efforts to get true counsel and help from her child, would sigh and kiss Lucy, and go away by herself to her own room to compose her mournful letter to her husband's partners. She had to do it for her child's sake; and she had to do it utterly by herself, without anybody to advise or help her. Her letters were very painful, slow, and tedious productions. When she went into the story of her loss, her poor heart would fill, and her eyes, so that she could not see to go on. And her eyes were getting old and weary, even had there been no special reason. But she resumed again with unflinching courage next day, and at last they were sent off—intimations that would not carry misery to any family, but would yet sadden many friendly eyes for a day or two. When they were sent off, though Lucy had given no assent to them, Madame Saint-Ange was easier in her mind. It was hard upon her to feel so much unlike other people—so separated from everybody that knew her. It almost seemed to unsettle her identity to her own consciousness; she wanted to have somebody acknowledge her—somebody that knew without being told who she was.

And then the two would have discussions where they were to go—England was the desire of Madame Saint-Ange. The ideal in her mind was that pretty ideal village which exists chiefly in books, where there are cottages covered with honeysuckle, and a pretty rectory near, and an old church, and a squire whose wife would be kind to the two ladies in the little cottage-villa. This was the vision that appealed to her imagination; whereas Lucy was young, and felt differently, and thought within herself that in such a paradise, she, so heart-broken and disappointed, would

go mad or die. "I could not bear it if it were too quiet," she said. "The noise makes me that I cannot hear my heart beat—and when it is still I can hear nothing else. I like where there is noise and poor people toiling, and trouble, and pain, and misery. I think I could breathe there."

"Lucy, Lucy, that is not like you," said her astonished aunt.

"Not like what I was," said the girl. "I know I used to be different; everything used to be different. But when Dante went astray in the wood, he had to go through hell and purgatory before he could bear heaven," she said, suddenly, in one of those curious outbursts which startled Madame Saint-Ange. The tender-hearted woman did not know what the child meant.

"Oh, my pet, don't say such words!" she cried. She had a higher courage, a nobler unselfish soul than Lucy had, but yet she was shocked to hear such words, and did not know their meaning; and she could not comprehend how anybody should be led, by way of getting to heaven, through purgatory and hell.

"Let us go where there are people," repeated Lucy, "poor people; where there are trouble and pain, and a crowd, and all the world in a struggle. I know it's not how we used to think, but it is all I am good for now. And if I may work, then, dear auntie, better feelings may come at the end."

Madame Saint-Ange did not make any immediate reply; she looked wistfully at the young face which was so dear to her, but which in certain moods she could not understand, and was a long time turning it over in her mind. It was difficult for her to put herself in Lucy's place and understand Lucy's thoughts; but by dint of sheer love she contrived to do it, and to make out how the sight of the universal struggle, and of that constant sorrow and pain against which the world bears up blindly with an unconscious grandeur of patience, might be of use to an inexperienced human soul suddenly turned into the bitterest depths. When she came to have an inkling of this, Madame Saint-Ange announced her decision in very simple words. It was next morning before she spoke, but she did it as if their conversation had been but the moment before.

"Well then, my love, we will go to Paris," she said with the faintest sigh; and Lucy accepted it in the same tacit way. Thus when the winter began to close in, the leaves to fall, and the days to grow short, it was to Paris they went. They had no friends awaiting them in England or anywhere. They might go where they liked, which is so melancholy a freedom to people who have not been used to it. And they went away accordingly to the great tumultuous city which is so gay in its outside, so dark and mournful underneath, so cruelly foreign and strange to the sad and weary. There they took a little apartment high up at the corner of a street in old Paris—in all that is left of old Paris. I do not remember what was the name of the street. It was in that quarter where religious booksellers and shops of ecclesiastical orna-

ments, vestments, and crucifixes, and sacred images, and everything that belongs to the service of the church, abound; far away from the Paris which strangers know, and where life means nothing but gaiety and pleasure-making—*distraction*, as the French word is. But there was not much *distraction* in that corner of the Faubourg St. Germain. When it was the day of some grand "course" or promenade, you found it out there only by a shade of deeper quiet, the absence on the causeways of the occasional *fiacre*, which that day had sought a better market. This was where our two poor women came. And here they were to spend the first anniversary of their loss and resurrection, and live as best they could through their first Christmas Day.

III.

It is not original to say that a holiday season is a sad season for people who are not making holiday, and that Christmas is of all times the saddest to those who have no Christmas meetings to look for, no greeting of friends, no dear faces gathered round the table, none of all the many conventional happinesses that are supposed to exist at that time. Madame Saint-Ange and her niece took as little notice to each other as was possible of the time of the year. Things about did not wear the familiar aspect of an English Christmas, which was one thing they were both thankful for; but they tried not to think of it, not to speak of it. Their own anniversary came first, and it was very hard upon them. It was a windy, stormy, rainy day, which was better, perhaps, than had it been bright.

"We ought to thank God this morning, Lucy," said Madame Saint-Ange, with white lips, as they sat over their sad breakfast. Heaven knows she was not very thankful in her heart. It was all present to her mind, every little incident and detail; and she was not glad she had been saved, though she tried to say she was.

"Oh, auntie, I cannot," said poor Lucy, "I cannot! But it was their fault, not His. He meant that we should all have gone together, if nobody had interfered—"

"Lucy, it is wicked to say so," said her aunt, with tears; but in her heart she was feeling much the same; and they did not speak of it to each other again.

They went out together, and stole into the nearest church, where the tapers were twinkling in the wintry gloom, and where preparations were being made for the Christmas sermons. It had become a habit with them. Madame Saint-Ange sat down on one of the chairs which had been arranged for the preaching, and Lucy strayed away into a dark corner to some of the dim chapels round. It was not the holy image on the high altar, or the saint in the little shrine that attracted them. It was the quiet, the shelter, the freedom, the other people who were praying there, the solitude, yet the communion. When the woman who let the chairs came to Madame Saint-Ange for her sous, she told her in a whisper of

the preacher who was to begin that night. He had been a person of the world, she said, and had lost everything, and had become a priest. It was like a *conte des fées*, only it was *triste, terriblement triste*, and not amusing at all. But a great many people were coming to hear him because of his strange story. Madame Saint-Ange listened, but scarcely heard; she was not thinking of preachers; her heart was full, and somehow this day seemed to bring her nearer to him from whom she had been parted a twelvemonth since. If she could but see him, hear his voice, know where he was? Oh, how strange, how strange, that death, a thing which happens in a moment, should part so utterly those who have spent years and years together, and know every thought in each other's heart! How strange that there was no way of breaking this awful silence! Madame Saint-Ange's mind was full of this thought, and she had put up her patient hand underneath her veil to wipe away the few silent deep-drawn tears in which her heart overflowed. If she had seen her husband sitting by her, she thought she would not have been surprised. It was his absence, the want of him, the silence and end of all things, that struck her with that sharp pang of wonder. It was at this moment that Lucy came to her so suddenly, so wildly, and with a face so ghastly pale that her aunt thought she was about to faint. Lucy could not speak, she could only gasp, and fix her eyes upon Madame Saint-Ange, with a look which it was impossible to interpret. The good woman awoke in a moment from that little silent indulgence in her own grief. She took Lucy by the arm, and led her out to the door, where a gust of rain and wind dashed in their faces.

"My darling, let us go home. It is too much for you," she said.

"What," said Lucy, "what is too much? Did you hear it too?"

"Lucy, Lucy, I don't understand you. I heard nothing," said Madame Saint-Ange; and she trembled from head and foot as it came into her mind that at last this had been too much for poor Lucy's brain, and that it had given way.

"But I heard it," said Lucy. "I heard it as distinctly as I hear what I am saying now. I am not mad. I am in my senses. It was *his* voice!"

"Oh, Lucy!" said the poor aunt; "oh, my child, my child!"

"You think I am going mad," said Lucy, "or that I am wild with grief. I am not. I am glad. I am so happy I should like to sing. I heard it as well as I hear the wind, or my own words. It was his voice. Do you think I could mistake any voice in the world for his? Now I am sure that God means me soon to die. It was kind—oh, it was kind of Him to let me hear Robert's voice!"

She had never called her lost lover by his name for all this long year, and her aunt trembled more and more as she heard the tone of her words, and saw the exaltation in her eye.

"Oh, my darling, come home!" she said. "It has been too much for you. You will be better when you have got over this day."

"You think that is all," said Lucy, "but you are mistaken. It is not imagination or excitement. I heard his voice. It sounded as if he was speaking to somebody. Who can tell what angels may be about that he was talking to? Don't, auntie, dear, don't think I am mad. I heard it as plain as I hear you. I was over there in the north aisle, where it is darkest, and where there is nobody; and all at once I heard him speak. If he had spoken to me," said Lucy, with a touch of natural feeling breaking in, "I should have been more content. But one should not ask too much. It must be for a sign."

"My dear child," said Madame Saint-Ange, unable to contain her terror and distress, "you know they never come back; they are happy where they are. It is the day, and your own thoughts, and—Lucy, dear, here is a carriage. Come home!"

"Yes, auntie, if you like," said the girl. She was quite submissive and quiet, but her face was white as marble, and her eyes wild—or, at least, they seemed wild to the watcher. And as Madame Saint-Ange turned to tell the coachman where to drive them, something occurred to her also which made it hard for her to restrain a wild cry of fright and wonder. What was it? A man who was passing?—an accidental resemblance?—or a shadow of the lost? She shut her lips close to restrain the cry that came to them. She said to herself that her own imagination too was excited. Lucy, heaven be praised, was not looking that way. The widow put down her crape veil over her face, and leaned back in her corner, and tried to conceal how she was trembling. But she shook so that it was impossible, and then it became Lucy's turn to interpose.

"Are you frightened, auntie?" she said. "Why should you be frightened? If you were to see Uncle Louis beside you, would you be afraid of him? I always knew they were beside us. I have wondered and wondered, till my heart was breaking, why God would never let us see them or hear them. Frightened for our own who love us best!" said Lucy, shaking her head softly in her tender enthusiasm. But Madame Saint-Ange for her part, being put to the test, was not so strong.

"Don't speak of it," she said, "don't speak of it, Lucy. I feel as if I should cry out, or go out of my senses. Oh, my dear child, don't say any more. We should have stayed at home. We should not have come out, even to church, on this dreadful day."

But things were not much better at home. Something ghostly and mysterious seemed to loom in the air about them. Every time that Madame Saint-Ange turned her head, it seemed to her as if a shadow standing somewhere vaguely behind, disappeared suddenly not to meet her eye. When she tried to read, it seemed to her as if she could see it half-hidden by the *portière* of the shrouded French doorway; but when she looked direct at the doorway there was nothing there but the lines of the drapery. A dread was upon her—she could not tell of what.

Could it be the blessed beloved spirit, the true being whom they loved, who played, or seemed to play, those pranks about her? Or was it something delusive, perhaps wicked in that well-known shape? Or was it mere imagination, excited by grief, and Lucy's fancied voice? She could not tell. And when she looked out in the dark, from the little balcony which guarded their high window, far down upon the street underneath, it seemed to her that among the passers by there was always some one passing who was like Robert. "There are so many young men like him," she said to herself, faltering, and tried to believe that was all. But it was not all. There was something abroad in the very atmosphere that had not been there yesterday. And though she never left Lucy alone, and even in the tumult of her own thoughts tried to keep up a constant conversation with her niece, and divert her thoughts, she could see that Lucy's ears were always pre-occupied—that she was listening for something, just as Madame Saint-Ange was looking for something. What could it mean? Could it be a supernatural intimation to them both on this day that had begun their loneliness—this day on which their lives had been preserved—saved, as it were, against their will? Did it mean that their deliverance drew near, as they thought—that the forlorn watchers were to be taken back to their own? Madame Saint-Ange was more shaken, more overcome, by these strange fancies than by all the endurance and suffering of the long year.



Lo t.

IV.

AND thus Christmas Day came on. When one's heart is breaking, it is a dreadful day. When you are turned over to the dim, yet awful ghosts of

other years; when the long evening passes in silence and no foot echoes on the stair, no voice says your name; when you see the light gleaming in the pleasant windows, and the household bands flying home, like doves to their nests, and hear the flutter of words that have no longer any meaning for you—"merry Christmas!" the thoughtless joyous creatures say, "happy New Year!" and you would give them anything you possess if they would but keep silent, and cease to remind you—you who have no need to be reminded. Day of joy and household meeting! day of desolation and uttermost solitude!

"God rest you,
merry gentlemen,
Let nothing you
dismay,
Remember Christ
our Saviour
Was born on
Christmas Day."

I do not know if these words were in Madame Saint-Ange's homely, tender, reasonable soul, but I know that the spirit of them was. The impression of that visionary dread had passed off her a little. They had heard no more voices, seen no more visions; and, by way of keeping Christmas, the only way that remained to them, the two ladies had taken in hand to clothe the children of their poor neighbour in the man-

sarde above; who, for her part, had learned to weep over their sad looks, and to take that tender interest in their sorrows which is so much more open and demonstrative among the poor than the rich. Poor Madame Minard knew their story very imperfectly, but she knew that the English ladies who were so good to her were very lonely and very sad. "*Du courage, ma bonne petite dame!*" she said, as Marie at St. Malo had said. "*Du courage!*" "Let nothing you dismay." This was the spirit in which Madame Saint-Ange went to church on Christmas morning, she and Lucy, and tried to say their prayers and do their duty, and listen to an

English sermon, as Englishwomen ought, notwithstanding that every leaf of holly on the homely walls seemed to prick them to their hearts. They had to cross the Seine from their quarter to get to an English church, and it was very bright, though it was very cold, as the two black figures crossed the sunshine. Could they ever have anything to do with the world again? In the afternoon, Madame Minard brought down all her little ones in the frocks Madame Saint-Ange had made for them, to show how warm and comfortable they were. And she stayed, with her baby in her arms, to *distrain* her neighbours a little, and had a great deal to talk of. Madame Minard was not a *dévôt*, but there was a great talk in the quarter about the new preacher who had preached the Advent in Sainte-Geneviève. He had been a secular and worldly person but lately: even now he was only a novice or deacon, though he was such a great preacher: and this very day of Noël, in the evening it was he who was to conduct the office of the Rosary. Madame Minard herself was a member of that fraternity, and it was her opinion that to go on this special evening would *distrain* mademoiselle. Lucy, however, was not of

that mind—she was exhausted and quiet, too tired even to feel her sorrow. Indeed, it had seemed to Madame Saint-Ange that her strength had failed during these last few days. But, as for her aunt, who was generally so much the more patient and quiet of the two, this Christmas Day had been more than she could bear. She could not read, she could not talk, she could not sit still. Her fear and sense of a mysterious presence about her had come back with the darkness; she seemed to see things gliding in and out under the shadow of the *portière*: and as she could not tell her feelings to any one—and, indeed, was ashamed even to acknowledge them to herself—there was no way

of getting her mind clear of those phantoms. It was this which induced her to go out with Madame Minard after the lamp was lighted, leaving little Adèle in her new frock beside Lucy. Motion itself was a relief to her. Sainte-Geneviève was all twinkling with tapers, and the *confrérie* of the Rosary filled the whole church, sitting and kneeling in long lines as close as the chairs could be placed. They were mostly humble women in white caps, like Madame Saint-Ange's companion, and they were all absorbed at that moment in the evening service. When it was over there was a little pause. It was the same church in which

Lucy had heard the voice. From their last visit to it on that day, both of them had changed somehow. Lucy had grown paler, feebler, all that a woman warned of approaching death might be expected to look; and Madame Saint-Ange's mind was full of a nameless dread of which she could have given no reasonable account. She sat and thought of this while her poor companions all around her told their beads—thought and thought, and turned it over in her mind, till their white caps glimmered faintly round her, and she could not have told where she was. Then Madame



Found.

Minard roused her, putting her hand on her arm, shaking her by the shoulder, whispering in her ear. "*Le voilà!*" said the good woman. Madame Saint-Ange felt as if she had been suddenly awakened. She looked at the altar with dazzled eyes, but there was no one there; then she turned towards the great black pulpit, which was an erection of last century, with a big canopy over it, and gilt festoons and clouds. In it there stood a priest, with his head turned away from her towards the altar, a spare figure wearing a white alb, but no other ornament. Something in the outline of his head and in his attitude struck her strangely. Unaware of what she

was doing, she rose up conspicuous in her black dress, in the widow's weeds which only English widows wear, among the white-capped mass. She could not have told why, nor what she was thinking, nor how her mind was stirred so strangely. Then he turned round, and turned his pale face full upon her, and began his address. "*Mes chers amis,*" he said, that was all—next moment a hoarse shrill cry rang through the church, the black figure which had been standing up below stretched forth its arms wildly, and then fell down in a faint, and the priest stood in the pulpit struck dumb, with eyes which seemed to be starting from his head. "*Mon Dieu! que c'est qu'il a? que c'est qu'elle a?*" cried the good women of the Rosary. It was an awful moment to M. le Curé, who was sitting below. When he rushed up to the pulpit he found his reverend brother almost fainting too; and the big Suisse belonging to Sainte-Geneviève was carrying Madame Saint-Ange out to the porch. It was the most extraordinary incident which had ever broken in upon the devotions of the parish *confrérie*.

More than an hour passed before Madame Saint-Ange was able to be taken home, and even then she had to be carried up the long stair. She went into the room where she had left Lucy, a different creature. She had taken off her bonnet and thrown it down on the floor; and though she tottered with weakness, her sweet old eyes were gleaming with the strangest light. She tottered into the room supported by Madame Minard on one side, and holding on by the chairs and tables with the other. The change in her face was like a change wrought by a miracle. The shock had been such that every line was deepened, every feature sharpened. She looked old, worn, feeble—so worn that the light in her eyes gleamed out as if they had been lamps. Though she came in slowly by reason of her weakness, her look and the bending forward of her figure were as if she was rushing forward headlong. She did not even see there was already some one there. When she got to Lucy's sofa she threw herself on her knees, and clasped her child's hand, and put down her cheek upon it. "Lucy, Lucy, Lucy!" she said; and then lifted up her head and looked in Lucy's eyes. Her face spoke in every line, though she said no more. If Lucy had been ignorant, she would have known that something unspeakable, something inconceivable had come about.

But Lucy was not ignorant. When her aunt looked at her thus, she sprang up from the sofa, and grasped Madame Saint-Ange's hand. "Is it true?" she cried; "Auntie, is it possible?—is it true?"

"*Je vous dis qu'ils sont sauvés! sauvés! sauvés!*" said a voice at her elbow; "and mademoiselle will not believe me. They are saved! saved! saved! Oh, *mon Dieu!* He is come to me, the *bon petit Monsieur*, all sobbing—and I have made his heart dance for joy; but mademoiselle will not believe me. Let madame speak!—Let madame speak!—and then we shall

"Auntie," said Lucy, pressing the two

feeble hands she held—"Speak!" And then she drew a long, sobbing breath. "Robert! Robert! Robert!" she called out, with a voice which was shrill with wild hope and despair, without waiting for any answer. That was the true test. She knew that if Robert had sent this messenger he would not himself be far away. Then, while they all held their breath and listened, there came a rush of footsteps; and like a sudden angel through the curtains of the doorway, where they had seemed to see his ghost, came forth, incredible, indisputable, holding out his eager hands, the drowned lover—the lost Robert, who had been dead, and was alive again. When she saw him, Madame Saint-Ange sank back softly into the kind arms that were stretched out to support her. Her anxiety was over. The joy had so nearly killed herself that she had feared it would kill Lucy. But at twenty joy is easy to bear; and for Lucy, sobbing and smiling on her lover's shoulder, and forgetting in that moment all her sorrows, there was no further ground for anxiety. She had leisure now to think of herself.

Then there ensued one of those confused moments of explanation from which nobody ever learns anything. The four who had been separated a year before were now together again. They told each other their escape, and not one of them understood anything about it except the quite miraculous fact that there they all were; and they held each other's hands as if, without holding fast by it, the vision of delight might melt away. It was Marie from Saint Malo who had brought Lucy the news, and who stood benign behind them, with her noble peasant-countenance framed in her high Breton cap. It was she who had supported Madame Saint-Ange. It was she who had placed her on the sofa, round which the others gathered. She was wiping her eyes with her white apron as she stood and looked on. She had helped to save their lives; she had helped to preserve Lucy's health and reason afterwards; she had told Robert of their safety; she had brought the good tidings to mademoiselle. All through this dreadful year she had been mixed up with their fortunes, and therefore she stood by in honest, open sympathy, not thinking it needful to withdraw, as an Englishwoman of the same condition might have done. "*Les pauvres! comme ils sont heureux!*" Marie was saying to herself as she dried her eyes. But yet there was one thing that drove her to her wits' end.

"It was Marie who told me," said Lucy. "Dear Marie, who was always so good to me! But, auntie, you had found it out—how did you know?" The girl had kissed her in her joy, but up to this moment she had not looked into Madame Saint-Ange's face. Now, when she did so, she stopped short suddenly in her rejoicing, and woke up, as it were, to clearer consciousness. There was something in her aunt's eyes which she could not understand. It was joy, but it was not joy like Lucy's. The elder woman had fallen suddenly out of the agitation of her happiness into a curious calm. Lucy, with her wondering eyes,

followed her aunt's look, and they fell upon a figure which she had not as yet realized, and which Marie at the same minute was gazing at with unfeigned consternation. It was a figure in a priest's dress, with tonsured head and shaven cheeks, upon which Lucy thus gazed. It was her uncle Louis. He was very pale—paler even than she herself was; his hands were clasped tightly together, his head drooping, and he stood like a man in a dream, gazing strangely at his wife. They had loved each other all their lives; they had been of one heart and one soul. Now they had met after a year's hopeless separation. To Lucy and Robert the meeting was like life to the dead—but what was it to the elder pair?

A long pause followed, and they all held their breath. Then M. Saint-Ange came forward to the sofa on which his wife lay. "Now it is for me to speak," he said. "Mary, you see what I have done."

"Yes, Louis," said Madame Saint-Ange; and then there was another pause. The hearts of the two young people, who stood with Marie behind, began to beat high with wonder. Their story was all straightforward and without complications. They stood wistfully behind, having no power to interpose, and looked on at this strange scene. The interest had shifted and gone away from them. Nothing in their simple loves and sorrows could ever equal this.

"I thought I had lost you for ever," he said. "Mary, do not look as if you reproached me. I thought to do well. I meant to serve God."

Poor Madame Saint-Ange raised herself as if to go to him, to throw herself—old, faithful, tender wife as she was—into his arms, to bid him do as he would—as he thought best. But then she stopped, and the strange check thus put upon her nature wrung her heart and forced the tears over her cheeks. He was a priest. She had found him, but she had lost him. "Louis," she cried; "Louis, I know; but, oh! must we be parted—altogether parted—for ever? Am I not to see you any more?"

M. Saint-Ange threw himself down upon his knees, by his wife's feet, and took her trembling hands; and he wept. Perhaps he would not have done it had he been an Englishman; but however that might have been, he wept. They mingled their tears together, the two old people. It was not with them as with the lovers. There was little time before them, and no hope. They clasped each other's hands, and bowed their grey heads, and wept together. And then the spectators felt they had no business there, and stole out softly, half astonished to feel their own astonishing joy, and love, and thankfulness thrown into the shade for the moment. They went out with noiseless steps, awed by the sight. And the husband and wife were left alone. Marie only paused as she left the room to look back upon that strange group—the kneeling priest in his *soutane*, with the ineffaceable tonsure on his head, and his face hidden in his hands, and the weeping woman who bent over him, her soft old face radiant and sweet with pity. "*Comme madame est belle!*" said Marie to herself, as she went away reluctantly, scandalized,

astonished, touched to the heart. She wanted to see how it was going to end.

"Mary," said M. Saint-Ange when they were alone, "it is not yet too late. If you require it—If you think it well——"

She was a wife and she was a Protestant, and it was a terrible trial to come through. Her heart laboured and struggled in her breast. She was wounded in her affection—hurt in her sense of right; but yet—— Her face was beautiful, as Marie said. She had seen in a moment how it must be, and her brave heart accepted the necessity. Not hers was the spirit which makes burdens heavier. She looked at him, and her lip melted into an ineffable smile.

"Louis," she said, her voice faltering only as she began, "we are getting old; let us not be quite parted, *mon ami*. Let me live near you and see you sometimes. Do not try to undo what has been done, and—do not be afraid for me."

Then he lifted his head and looked gratefully at her, with a gratitude that broke her heart. "Do you mean it?" he said. "My dear, will you be content?"

"I shall be content," said Madame Saint-Ange, though her heart was sinking lower and lower. And she smiled upon him till he believed her. And then they kissed each other solemnly, as with the kiss of the dying, and called in their children and Marie, and had the table spread, and broke bread together, "with gladness and joyfulness of heart." Before they parted, Lucy and Robert had begun to bethink themselves of their plans. They took up the thread of their young life where it had been broken off, and found no difficulty in the task. Their momentary discouragement, and the subduing influence of these strange circumstances and M. Saint-Ange's priestly dress, soon died away from the young creatures at the height of their happiness. It was strange of Uncle Louis—but what then? "Auntie does not seem to mind," said Lucy; and they went back to the plan that had been so terribly interrupted a year before.

But when Madame Saint-Ange found herself in her own room that night, the smile faded off her face; it dropped; and underneath she came forth old—older by ten years than she had been that morning, with wrinkles on her brow, and the chill of age at her heart. She said nothing even to herself. She cried a little softly, under protest as it were, under her breath—her patient heart was wrung—"But, after all, it is only me," she said to herself after a while. That made it easy to bear.

And this is how it all came to an end. The two men had been swept off in their raft, and after tossing wildly in the darkness for some time like a nutshell, and hearing the crash with which the ship struck on the rock, the turning tide had carried them off to sea, where they had been picked up by a ship outward-bound. Their strength had been so much exhausted, that it was some days before they were able to realize their position, and then they

were on their way to the distant Brazils. Not a hope that Madame Saint-Ange and Lucy could have escaped was in their mind. And the shock had a terrible effect upon the elder sufferer, who had always been a pious and faithful Catholic. There were priests on board going to a distant mission, and their presence gave effect to his impulse. Notwithstanding Robert's remonstrances, M. Saint-Ange had taken immediate steps to enter their order; it proved even that a similar idea had been in his mind when he was a youth, and that he had indeed been a seminarist in actual preparation for the priesthood, when the world came in and claimed him for its own. This abandoned vocation, he and his new admirers thought, was no doubt the cause of the great affliction that had come upon him. Moved by this inspiration, and by his terrible misfortune, M. Saint-Ange had entered the brotherhood to which his teachers belonged, and though but a novice, had preached with such effect that M. le Curé of St. Geneviève, who had a brother in the mission, on his arrival in Paris was urgent for his aid. This was how it came about. He could have broken his vows on this unlooked-for revelation; but his mind having been violently launched upon this new way, could not bear to be turned back. Turning back is impossible in this world. He had done it in haste, in ignorance, perhaps even in the petulant impatience of sorrow—but it was done, and it was the service of God to which he had devoted himself. The position was so strange that husband and wife were alike unhinged. From grief they had come to joy, and from joy to perplexity and doubt and confusion. They separated that night, not knowing whether they were happy or miserable; and yet they had met and spoken, and loved each other still.

Next morning Madame Saint-Ange woke up late after a troubled sleep, for it had been long before she could close her eyes; and the first sound she heard was Lucy's voice singing softly a song of the old times. Not a note had Lucy sung for all the dreary past year. It was some good angel inspired her to cheer the awakening of the kind soul who had

more to bear than she had. And then the aunt cried by herself, and dried her eyes and said her prayers, and was ready for the new day. She put on her courage and patience as she put on her gown, the brave little woman. "Lucy will be happy, bless her!" she said to herself, with a little sob; "and"—after a long interval—"he will come to see me every day."

Lucy was very happy. They had a Christmas feast that day at which Madame Saint-Ange wore the bright countenance of old times, and looked the world in the face. And after a while the young people were married, and entered upon their individual life. They had to go to England, where their friends and Robert's occupation were. And they were happy, and had their struggles with the world like the rest of us. But there was a little white house near the Convent at Auteuil, where there was no struggle—a little bright English house, though everything about it was French—in which, day by day, a grave priest paid the visit which was the bright point of his life, and in which Madame Saint-Ange, more English, more Protestant than she had ever been in her life, lived under the shadow of the convent walls. She had found friends among the nuns inside, and outside everybody was her friend; and the Reverend Père Saint-Ange took her advice in all his good works. And the sight of her, kind and sweet, and beautiful in the beauty of age and grey hairs, was a comfort to all the world around her. I do not say she did not feel lonely sometimes—I do not say that little outbreaks of indignation at the change did not disturb the calm of her life; such things happened, and raised a little storm, and brought a few tears, that did but make the air sweeter afterwards: but I do not think she had a sad life.

This little story is probably wrong in certain details, as stories always must be that are told by peasant lips. I don't know exactly how a Catholic priest ought to have behaved in such a strange emergency. This is how my friend Marie at St. Malo, told the tale to me.

